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Elshof, A.J.M.

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE EMBODIMENT OF RELIGIOSITY.

The Development of Catholicity towards the Common Good.

Toke Elshof

Assistant Professor Practical Theology / Religious Education

Faculty of Catholic Theology - Tilburg University

Tilburg, The Netherlands

a.j.m.elshof@uvt.nl

0031529- 435152

00316- 10256611

**CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE EMBODIMENT OF RELIGIOSITY:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLICITY TOWARDS THE
COMMON GOOD**

Toke Elshof

*Catholic School of Theology,
Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands*

Abstract

In the Netherlands, the relation between Catholic schools and Catholic Church was apparent during the pillarized educational system and culture of the first decades of the twentieth century. In the post-pillarized decennia afterwards, their connection transformed and became less recognizable. At first glance, their contemporary relation sometimes seems only superficial. This article argues that Catholic schools are connected with the Catholic religious tradition in an embodied way and in their orientation towards the common good. Furthermore, the embodied religiosity expressed in daily school life, is

more than both schools and church realize, intertwined with ecclesiastical reflections on Catholic education.

During pillarization, Catholic schools were exclusively intended for Roman Catholic children. Together with parents and parish they formed a Catholic educational triangle (Maas and Ziebertz 1997), teaching pupils into the Catholic faith and Church and leading them towards a recognizable Catholic way of life. In post-pillarized times the recognizability of Catholic schools has declined.

The former school catechesis developed into religious education lessons informing about several religions. Another change concerns the religious background of the present school population, which began to reflect the religious diversity in society. Furthermore, the present relation to the Catholic Church can be characterized by an unmistakable distance, not only at the formal and administrative level but also in the experience of estrangement between schools and church. Both school life and church presume a decrease in their mutual engagement and question whether these schools can be regarded as Catholic schools (Van der Donk and Kimman 2010).

This article provides another perspective. It explores the relevance of two of the distinctiveness of Catholic lived religiosity, discovered in Roman Catholic family life (Elshof 2008, 2012 a). The first characteristic concerns the

embodiment of the religiosity and the focus on human dignity, social life and ethical practices (Elshof 2012b). Although Catholic lived religiosity can be expressed in explicit and recognizable ways, it mainly comes to expression in practices which are connected to religion in an implicit or unconscious way (Elshof 2014). The second feature concerns the correlation between domestic life on the one hand, and ecclesiastical reflections concerning family life on the other hand. The lived religiosity in family life appeared to be interwoven with ecclesiastical reflections, while the transformations within this lived religiosity also correlated with conversions within church documents concerning topics as sexuality, marriage, upbringing, social involvement and freedom of conscience (Elshof 2010). This article clarifies that these two characteristics of catholic religiosity which are revealed in family life, are expressed in catholic school life as well.

The first section describes scientific research on the implicit curriculum that expresses a coherent value orientation which plays a significant role within Catholic school life, complemented by Dutch publications about daily school life and inspiration supporting the hypothesis of an implicit curriculum. The second section deepens the issue of relatedness between the coherent value orientation expressed in the hidden curriculum permeating daily school life, and ecclesiastical reflections about the Catholic church and education. The third

section illustrates how Catholic schools provide an answer to current social problems such as the religious illiteracy, the lack of religious dialogue and the longing for inspiring communal life. The fourth, concluding section relates the issue of the challenging relationship between school life and church life, to the future of catholic education.

THE IMPLICIT CURRICULUM IN RESEARCH AND SCHOOL LIFE

Support for the hypothesis that Catholic schools are Catholic in an implicit and embodied way comes from Cameron (2013). She considers openness towards society and the willingness to contribute to civic engagement and to the advantage of the common good as characteristics of Catholic schools. Drawing from several studies investigating Catholic schools (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993; Hansen 2002; Groome 2003; Meyer 2007), she states that Catholic schools attempt to cultivate a school culture that combines an orientation to the personal development of students with attention to the needs of others and openness to the world. Referring to Dreeben (1968) and Sikkink (2004), she underlines the important role of the implicit curriculum, i.e., the values, orientations and expectations students acquire as they participate in school life. The implicit curriculum supports and complements the explicit

curriculum in the lessons. Her argument is complemented by a Dutch research of De Wolff (2000) named “Typically Christian?”, investigating the identity of Christian schools in the Netherlands. She clarifies that an implicit curriculum plays a noticeable role in protestant school life as well; a Christian identity provides the school with a framework of commitments and values that are relevant to the religious domain, the pedagogical domain, the educational/curricular domain and the organizational domain. Concerning Catholic schools, her observation of a fifth, social domain is remarkable because she perceives this domain only in Catholic education (2000, 67). This suggests that the school’s vision of the relevance of education for society is a characteristic of Catholic education,¹ and that the emphasis on the social domain might be “Typically Catholic”.

The hypothesis of the implicit curriculum in Dutch Catholic schools also is supported by publications of the Dutch Catholic School Board (a set of books *Katholieke scholen: het vertrouwen waard* 2009-2010 and a dvd *Kiezen en Delen* 2010). They discuss the daily practice and inspirations of Catholic schools and clarify that daily school life is permeated by value orientations. These insights about daily school life and inspiration reinforce the impression that the focus on society is more or less sacred within Catholic education. This

¹ This does not imply that the social domain is not important within protestant education, but concerns the question whether this domain is important as a reference of religious identity.

is substantiated not only by mission statements (formal identity) but also by what parents, teachers and school managers consider highly important (lived identity). Catholic schools are strongly focused on an education contributing to society and to the *bonum commune*. In fact this social domain can be regarded as a comprehensive framework, and a background against which the other domains become meaningful. These studies altogether confirm the assumption that Catholic school life expresses a value orientation. However, when looking at the hypothesis that the implicit religiosity revealed in family life also plays a role in the implicit curriculum of Catholic schools, the question is relevant whether the implicit curriculum can be considered as religiously founded or religiously inspired.

IMPLICIT CURRICULUM AND CATHOLIC FAITH

Catholic Social Teaching

The publications of the Dutch Catholic School Board and the investigations of the practice and underlying values orienting Catholic school life mentioned above, demonstrate a Catholic identity. This identity responds to the contemporary needs of pupils and their parents, and the needs of teachers

and board members in the context of modern society. Although the background of a value orientation is not always recognized, the roots of this orientation are closely connected to the Catholic religion. In fact, the main themes of the Social Teaching of the Church appear in the importance given to the social domain (the society surrounding the school), and the pedagogical domain (the society of the school itself).² Consequently, we can ascertain that Catholic schools, in their attempt to respond to the needs of modern society, are connected with Catholic religion by embodying the main themes of the Social Teaching of the Church; a Teaching with the purpose of the contribution of Catholic faith to social life and to a righteous world (Elshof 2013a).

While Catholic schools were formerly connected with Catholic religion by being an instrument or an extension of parish life, the present relation to Catholic religion is expressed by the embodiment of the main themes of the Social Teaching of the Church. Catholic religiosity is put into practice in the personalized, relational view about mankind. Catholicity can also be found in the vision that education should serve the child's needs, in the attention for the common good and the emphasis on values such as justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. Present Catholicity is embodied in a religiously founded value structure (Elshof 2013b), rooted in the Catholic Social Teaching promoting the

² See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Chapter 2 (the Church's Mission and Social Doctrine) and Chapter 4 (Principles of the Church's Social Doctrine).

quality of education and formation and adding to the vitality and quality of the civic society, as Van Iersel emphasizes (2012).

Gravissimum Educationis

The transformations of the religious identity observed within of catholic school life are not accidental; they can be recognized within ecclesiastical reflections on Catholic schools as well. In that respect, the observations concerning the transformation within church reflections on Catholic school life made by Hendriks (1986, 19-20) are noteworthy. He mentions the preconciliar view expressed in *Divini illius Magistri* (1929) where the church, facing the threat of Italian fascism, emphasizes her right to watch over the entire organization and education of Catholic schools. When faced with changed social circumstances, her view transformed. As a result, the Second Vatican Council reflections on Catholic schools and education articulated in *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE, 1965) and postconciliar documents, differ from the preconciliar approach in several ways. While preconciliar documents mainly tend to worry about the rights and competences of the church and stress the importance of catechetical knowledge, the concern of GE is oriented towards the right of pupils to receive education while striving for the maturity

of the person as a whole and to a formation oriented to contribute to the common good (GE1). Another relevant change concerns the awareness that religious education should be an integrated part of daily school life, and that school life as a whole including religious education should express the Gospel spirit (GE8). The third change concerns the teachers' responsibility for religious education and for the religious identity of the school community. Different from the preconciliar view, GE emphasizes the importance of lay people (GE8).

Within this developments, GE ventilates a fundamental consciousness of the Second Vatican Council by articulating the role of laypersons within the assignment of the church. In *Lumen Gentium* (1964, 30-38) the Church emphasizes the significance of laypersons to participate in the mission of the church. Laypersons are, more than priests and religious, capable of bringing the world – society, the family, relations, labour and employment, but also the educational world – into contact with the Gospel message because their lives are interwoven with these spheres. While priests, religious and laypersons together are subservient to the common mission, they each have their own tasks. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965) confirms that the personal vocation of the ordinary faithful has a secular character; the ordinary faithful are called to contribute to the salvation of life in the world and to inspire the world from within with the Gospel spirit. According to Hendriks (1986, 303-314) GE

ventilates this conciliar awareness by regarding Catholic schools as an area of lay ministry and apostolate, which he regards as incarnational (197). His formulation underlines the consciousness that Catholic identity does not primarily need to be uttered in religious verbalization and knowledge. Catholic identity needs to be embodied and put into practice.

It may be obvious that an easy identification between daily Catholic school life and church documents about Catholic education must be avoided. Nevertheless, the review of church reflections on Catholic schools about Catholic education demonstrates a changed perspective, which is comparable to developments concerning catholicity within school life. School practices and church documents both stress that Catholic identity needs to be embodied in school life as a whole. Both school and church emphasize the pivotal role lay people play. Furthermore, school practices and church documents show similarities in the awareness that Catholic education is a service to the formation of pupils and that Catholic education needs to be oriented at social life. The overview of documents from the Second Vatican Council clarifies that Catholic school life is not only related to the Catholic Social Teaching, but that it is intertwined with ecclesiastical reflections on Catholic schools as well. Hence, school practices that attempt to provide an answer to social problems

can be considered as religious practices, for they are inspired by the religious appeal to contribute to the salvation of life in the world.

SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Religious Illiteracy

The first contribution to modern society concerns its secular character. A growing group of young people have not become familiar with religious traditions, which has resulted in religious illiteracy. This group has never received any knowledge of religious convictions, stories, symbols or rituals. Even young people who have been baptized have often not been properly introduced into a religious community or oriented to communal participation. Consequently, young people are not able to recognize the influence of religion within social life and within peoples' personal life. Additionally, they are not capable of realizing if and to what extent their expectations or value orientations are connected to a religion. However, their religious illiteracy does not imply a lack of religious interest.

Research recognizes that many young people in the Netherlands regard religion as an important subject that should be taught at school. Even

youngsters who do not have a religious background and have no familiarity with religious traditions share this opinion. (Vermeer 2013, 89). Pedagogues of religion argue that schools have a responsibility in stimulating the religious development of students by offering classes in religion and world view, because this contributes to their personal formation and their capacity to participate in a society with religious diversity (Roebben 2007; Miedema and Ter Avest 2011).

For a growing group of young people, Catholic and protestant schools form the first place where they come into contact with religions and world views in a structured way. The religious education classes offer an elementary introduction to stories, practices, rituals and ethics of religions and world views. Because of the increasing religious illiteracy, these schools add to the flourishing of young people's capacity to explore the religious dimensions of life in society and their personal life.

Religious Tolerance and Dialogue

While the first challenge to Catholic schools comes from the secular character of society, the second challenge originates from the multi-religious character of society. Religious tolerance and interreligious dialogue are put into practice in Catholic schools. Because of the religious pluralism within and

outside the school, the subject Religious Education usually pays attention to several religions. The Catholic faith no longer performs an assumed leading role.

The religious pluralism within the school presents a challenge to the subject of Religious Education and to the formation of pupils in multicultural and multireligious dialogue. The preference of the Catholic faith does not exclude religious education that teaches *about* and *from* religion, but requires attention for these concepts especially regarding the context of religious pluralism and growing intolerance towards foreigners. In this way, religious education is related to Catholic Social Teaching, because it stimulates and fosters the ability of youngsters to understand religiosity, religious similarities and religious differences. That this is not a contradiction goes back to the confidence of the Catholic tradition in the reasonableness of faith and in the importance of searching for truth in freedom. This was articulated by *Dignitatis Humanae*; the church declaration on religious freedom (1965).

Consequently, the preference of the Catholic faith does not imply that the school does not accept or promote the freedom of religion and world view. Research shows that a combination of an open view on social questions and religious diversity together with a positive attitude towards the contemporary meaning of the Catholic tradition, can become the breeding ground for

interreligious dialogue (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010). Therefore, Catholic school life, including religious education, contributes not only to the education of pupils, but also to society as a whole, because they offer a stimulus for religious dialogue.

Inspired and Inspiring Communal Life

The third challenge modern society poses to Catholic schools concerns the individualism within society. Several studies indicate that Catholic schools are becoming more important, also for non-believers. A research from Nijmegen (De Jong and Van der Zee 2008) observed that teachers, students and parents in Catholic education would like to have more school celebrations than the ones being held currently. This yearning for liturgy does not only exist in church goers or people with a religious background, but also in teachers who do not attend church, students in secondary education and parents of pupils who attend primary school. A second example are secondary school students who wish to have a prayer room in school. In this case as well, the wish is not connected to any measure of church involvement.

An investigation from Louvain University (reviewed by Van Lierde 2012) concludes something similar. Seventy percent of the parents of pupils in

Flemish Catholic education state that they are in favor of Catholic education, varying from mildly positive to strongly supportive. Because only nine percent of those parents attend church, one can again conclude that not going to church does not implicate that Catholic education is rendered irrelevant. To the contrary, it is secularization itself that leads parents to declare that the religious identity should be more apparent in schools.

An insight into this paradox is given by the practical-theological family research mentioned above (Elshof 2008). It clarifies the connection to the pillarization of the past, when Catholic schools had a clear task within the religious upbringing which was complementary to the task of parents and Church. This has led to the expectation that Catholic schools should do that, which the parents do not feel capable of doing. Remarkably enough, especially secular parents have these expectations. They realize they are not able to teach their children on religious matters. The inherited Catholic notion of the complementarity of school and family contribute to the current secular setting of parents wishing that the identity of the Catholic schools are made more apparent. In addition, Catholic focus on community plays a role. For many generations Catholic life was formed from the cradle to the grave, in accordance to a fixed pattern.

The self-evidence of belonging to a church has now made way to a large-scale secularism. Massive secularization however, has not led to a decrease in longing for community. To the contrary, in an individualized culture, the yearning to be connected to an inspired and sheltering community has increased. Catholicism still provides an answer, also for secular people. Occasionally this answer is found in a cultural Catholic sharing of common values and communal orientation. Sometimes answers are found in the religious ritual framework that helps people in their longing for transcendence and in dealing with the highs and lows in life. These two Catholic qualities continue in the expectations of Catholic education. There is a longing for the school to be an inspired and sheltering community, precisely because these kinds of communities do not exist outside the school anymore. Looking at it in this way, it is especially due to secularization that parents and teachers wish for children and themselves to get in touch with a community that is inspired. They long for a place where Catholic spirituality is made visible and where not the institutional and dogmatic aspects of the Church play a central role, but rather the celebrations, ethics, and community life.

What parents, school principals and teachers wish to impart on pupils is the realization and experience of being part of an inspired and inspiring community in which pupils are protected and where they know that they are

connected to the other. The other with a small letter 'o' and the Other with a capital 'O'. As an inspired community the Catholic school stands close to life, and offers an accessible way of being a Church. Therefore, Catholic education is closely connected to the vision the Church has on Catholic schools as a breeding ground for faithful life; a place where community formation, celebrations, learning, and service all take place, as expressed in the Dutch Bisschops Nota *Inspired and Self Assured* (*Beziëld en zelfbewust* 2002).

TO THE FUTURE

This article has revealed that the relation between Catholic schools and the Catholic church is stronger than is often assumed. In their implicit curriculum, Catholic schools embody a coherent value orientation rooted in the Catholic Social Teaching, which is intertwined with ecclesiastical documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The awareness that the connectedness between schools and church has not disappeared, but has continued on a deeper and less recognizable level, might add to a better understanding and a new dialogue about the religious identity of Catholic schools. However, the dialogue about the future of Catholic schools does not have any interest in an easy identification between the practice

of daily school life and church reflections about Catholic schools. Such an identification might even be detrimental to the dialogue, because it neglects the reality of estrangement between Catholic schools and the Catholic church.

Catholic schools sometimes demonstrate more openness to society than to the religious tradition they come from. Catholic schools reveal a tendency of accepting the Catholic heritage: name, ethics or rituals. This willingness is sometimes accompanied by the rejection of the religious meaning of this same heritage and of the relation with the Catholic community. In these situations, schools are willing to accept the Catholic heritage, but are reluctant to become an inheritor who is prepared to participate in and contribute to the future of the religious tradition. The reality of church life reveals some problematic tendencies as well. Church life for instance, sometimes demonstrates a focus towards internal parish problems. These problems tend to dominate the attention of the church to social life, and prevail over the ecclesiastical notion that Catholic schools partake in the mission of the church to present the Gospel in the world.

As a consequence, a dialogue between schools and church, concerning the identity and the future of Catholic schools, requires further investigations considering both the resemblances and the tensions between the views of schools and church on Catholic school identity.

Toke Elshof is Assistant Professor Practical Theology/Religious Education at Tilburg University in The Netherlands. E-mail: a.j.m.elshof@uvt.nl

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